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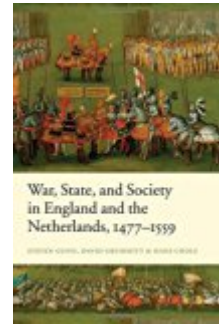
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Steven Gunn, David Grummitt, Hans Cools. *War, State, and Society in England and the Netherlands, 1477-1559*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xiv + 395 pp. \$150.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-920750-3.

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The Influence of War on England and the Netherlands before and after the Reformation

The study of early modern state formation dovetails with the military history genre of “war and society” because from the endemic warfare of the Reformation era emerged the Western nation-state. However, in the early twenty-first century both fields exhibit a degree of exhaustion. Social history has opened up new dimensions, but “war and society” too often embraces the theoretical at the expense of historical reality. While social scientists make significant contributions by contextualizing warfare, they rarely possess the archival training needed to unearth concrete data that tests their assertions.

Through the second half of the twentieth century, the debate over the military revolution (essentially, how “modern,” permanent, state-controlled armies came into existence) evolved from discourse concerning tactics, strategy, and weaponry to a chronologically and geographically broader debate over the origins of Western global dominance. That discourse closely linked state formation with the military revolution, and emphasized the frequency and scale of warfare (though one should draw with caution quantitative and qualitative distinctions between the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and the state-monopolized violence of 1477-1559). While state formation scholarship continues to fascinate, partly because of challenges to the contemporary nation-state, the penetration of the long-lived military revolution debate into subfields of state formation study still illustrates the limitations of social scientific conjecture and the need for new archive-based case studies.

This volume is just such a study, and it demonstrates that some comparative analyses simply are too formidable in scope and complex in evidence to be addressed by a single-author work. Steven Gunn, noted historian of Tudor England, resides at Merton College, Oxford, where he is fellow and tutor. David Grummitt, a senior editor at the History of Parliament Trust, recently published a Boydell and Brewer monograph on the English garrison at Calais. Providing a Dutch perspective and additional continental expertise (Gunn and Grummitt having also worked in European archives) is Hans Cools, an assistant professor at Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven, who has crafted nearly a dozen articles on warfare and nobility in Habsburg Europe. Most of his publications are not available in English, so Cools’s contributions to the volume under review make his scholarship accessible to a wider audience. Besides sharing Europe-wide research expertise, the authors each can be described as archival historians, and their new volume, *War, State, and Society in England and the Netherlands*, makes use of substantial archival evidence to illustrate their vision of the early modern state. That vision is genuinely integrated, as Gunn, Grummitt, and Cools worked collaboratively and thoughtfully throughout the text, so chapters were not simply divvied up. Punctuating their many archival “finds” are also cross references to the exploratory work of other leading experts who have contributed not just information but also methodology. The paradigmatic works of James Tracy, Michael Braddick, David Potter, and Jan Glete suggest how “modern” fiscal-

military institutions were gestating within late medieval states that possessed “patriarchal, confessional and dynastic” characteristics that would not normally be considered aspects of the modern nation-state (p. 333). The authors’ quadripartite sketch of the relationship between war and the state, towns and warfare, the military role of the nobility, and subjects “at war” are demarcated by crisp subheadings, and the tight organization of the chapters allows for selective investigation and makes complicated arguments unfold intelligibly.

Gunn, Grummitt and Cools’s primary focus is “how relationships of power throughout society were shaped by war” (p. 3). Did waging war enhance princely power, or rather increase the ruler’s dependence upon those subjects who possessed the requisite resources to conduct warfare? Did this formula differ in regard to the prince’s relationship with his nobility, as opposed to relations with communities, especially urban agglomerations? How did dynasticism, and later the Reformation, affect the above-mentioned relationships? The authors argue that war did indeed shape the early modern state, but that the chain of causation was often indirect and contradictory. The latter characteristic may be seen in that war brought together subjects and rulers, strengthening social bonds (as happened often in England), yet the conduct of warfare sometimes tore those very same ties of obligation and obedience (as occurred in Habsburg territories). The fiscal demands of war, primarily in the form of taxation, also complicated social affinities, and fiscal considerations sometimes brought subjects into more active participation with rulers, as for example with the English Parliament. Similarly, the States General after the 1557-59 fiscal crises managed, through the power of the purse strings, to seize the mechanics of tax collection and thus wield wider authority in the exercise of government. In analyzing the connection between fiscal growth and military institutions, the authors spell out clearly and convincingly the political ramifications of state borrowing and transfers to prosecute rulers’ wars. As taxation for war increased steadily, “in a kind of devolved state formation,” they argue, “the effective management of funded debt which would characterize later states was developed not at the level of central government, but at that of the individual provinces” in the Netherlands (p. 34).

The authors point to profound economic differences between the Netherlands and England, something perhaps underemphasized due to the intertwining of those states’ political military and religious destinies after 1572 (the first direct English military intervention on behalf

of the Dutch) and up to 1648. Hostilities had been inconceivable when the two fledging polities stood shoulder to shoulder against Roman Catholic Europe. Dutch militia drilled in Norfolk and Englishmen fought and died on the ramparts of Ostend. These states’ differences were also overshadowed after 1688, when they shared a ruler, and on into the early 1700s as they fought Louis XIV. This book helps to explain why in the mid-1600s, however, the only existing maritime Protestant republics warred against each other.

The authors also contrast the vitality of the political and economic interactions among the Netherlands city-states with England, where one city, the London metropolis, dominated commerce and monopolized the highest levels of politics. While the authors do not endorse English exceptionalism, it is difficult not to come away from this book without marveling at the unique circumstances of the Tudor monarchy. For example, though Protestantism created problems for virtually all dynasties, Henry VIII managed to consolidate religious reform on his own terms. Not only did he master his “legislative assembly” via a kind of paternal partnership, but Henry also maintained the consolidation of “marginal” areas (the North, Ireland, Wales) despite the Reformation, in marked contrast to his Habsburg (and French) counterparts. The state-promoted English Reformation (even if initiated by dynastic rather confessional motives) thus yoked the English nation (monarch, nobles, towns, and countryside) in a way that could not be done in the Netherlands. Taxation and religious practice were matters of contention in the latter dominions more so than in England. English taxation was more centralized and national than was possible in the Netherlands, and the monarch kept tighter rein over the production and distribution of artillery (for example) than could continental rulers. This research resonates with the old refrain of Tudor success in contrast with Habsburg failure, though perhaps the Tudors’ achievements (the survival of their dynasty into the seventeenth century and the preservation of the integrity of their realm) owe more to a Braudellian geographic advantage than the wisdom of the princes themselves. Still, the violence of Reformation Europe only occasionally washed up on Albion’s shores, and Henry VIII’s use of his representative assembly exhibited skill and cemented his monarchy during a time of tumultuous change. In a strategically more secure and culturally insular England, the exportation of bellicosity abroad was considered to promote or at least maintain “the polity’s inward health” (p. 332). The English case reveals that the Tudor monarchy exercised greater lat-

itude in wielding power than did either the Habsburgs or those Dutch civic polities that persistently negotiated with them over governance issues. Protestantism, in the form of a national church with its Book of Common Prayer, the authors argue, unified England at a time when continental states were fragmenting.

Conversely, the inhabitants of the Low Countries, who dealt with armed aggression on their doorstep through the centuries, conceived of warfare quite differently than the English of this period, and understandably regarded military actions as a curse. The authors acknowledge, furthermore, what they term Emperor Charles V's "internal aggression" and "external adventurism" (though that principle could also easily be applied to Henry VIII) (p. 10). Squarely set in continental political (and religious) traditions, the authors argue, the Habsburgs saw "crusading" as a monarchical vocation, and thus dealt with Protestantism as they and their ancestors combated Islam. Charles V chose to perform heroic deeds (hence the motifs of his classicized armor) more than he fretted over the nuances of a planned state. Indeed, the diversity of the Habsburg dominions confounded the imposition of uniformity. Charles might don a Romanized, muscled cuirass but he was in no position to initiate a new *Pax Romana*. Instead, he tried to content himself with exterminating Protestant "heretics" as Decius had executed Christians, becoming a sort of unholy Roman emperor. What bound and emasculated the Habsburgs, the authors contend, were those Dutch cities, the same polities that had fielded the infantry that humbled Charles the Bold of Burgundy with a halberd stroke to the face. They argue that urban polities that generated commerce were also promoting Protestantism, and it is this focus on the confluence of mammon and God that

makes the book's case studies so intriguing.

Despite the above-cited profound differences between the Habsburgs and the Tudors, the authors suggest that in the long run both dynasties saw consolidation of centralized authority for the same reasons. These were the necessity of suppressing internal revolt (especially after 1517); the persistence of the medieval conviction that the ruler must render justice (and hence maintain an accessible system of justice); and the fact that in the Reformation era rulers had to contend with, and sometimes drive, religious change. Hence, in the all-too-human course of negotiations over obligations and control of actions, rulers and their subjects (be they obstreperous city-dwellers, wealthy merchants, over-mighty nobles, or surly peasants) vied for the determination of policy at all levels of society. Economics is all about decision making, and the ensuing consequences (as noted by Jurgen Brauer and Hubert van Tuyl in *Castles, Battles, and Bombs: How Economics Explains Military History* [2007]). Gunn, Grummitt, and Cools's study is very much about polity, policy, and decision making, especially by rulers. Here the free will of individuals interacts with the blind forces of economics, and the application of economics explains how war shaped the state, and vice versa.

Gunn, Grummitt, and Cools thus do useful service in cautioning us about assumptions regarding the inevitability of the rise of the modern nation-state. Indeed, they make abundantly clear how anachronistic social scientific models can be. "As the twenty-first century sees national states in retreat before free markets, supranational unions of states, and international groups," the authors conclude, "it should be easier to analyse the development of early modern polities without the teleology of national state formation" (p. 334).

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